Australia's Troubadour: Gary Shearston 1939-2013

By Garry Victor Hill

Australia's Troubadour: Gary Shearston 1939-2013

By Garry Victor Hill

Revised and Expanded Edition

Frisky Press

Armidale Australia

2015

Contents

Gary Shearston's Life and music

Gary Shearston was one of the greatest voices in Australian music – and in several musical fields.

He excelled as a folklorist, composer, and singer of traditional folk. He composed protest songs, folk-rock, jazz, blues, gospel, sacred music, lullabies, country and pop rock. His life was in many ways extraordinary and for many he seemed to embody the optimistic sense of radicalism combined with discontent that swept Australia from the early 1960s to the early 1970s. Donald Horne aptly described that era in his book title *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-1972*. Like Horne's writing, much of Shearston's music was concerned with hope for a better world and like Horne, his life and cultural efforts were permeated with a deep love for Australia.

Gary Shearston was born on 9th January 1939 in the town of Inverell in the New England region of northern New South Wales, but when his father left for war service the Shearstons moved to Gary's maternal grandparents farm 'Ayrdie' two miles outside the northern New South Wales town of Tenterfield. His father became a farmer there after returning from war service.[1]

Although it is easy to idealise rural life, it seems Gary's time there was happy. His later song 'Tenterfield' has many lyrical descriptions and is a paean to the town and surrounding countryside. His lyrics refer to visions of the past that are almost pagan, sometimes pantheistic and sometimes patriotic; rocky outcrops that act as sentinels, the early Scottish musicians and dancers are conjured up as ghostly visions; and he includes Sir Henry Parkes in the 1890s at the Tenterfield School of Arts starting his inspiring speech that would lead to Australian Federation. In one of his last songs 'Pathways to a Celtic Land' he would link his time in Celtic parts of Britain with the cultural heritage of the Celts in New England. For Gary the past was not something remote and long dead, but a continuing presence in the present. More prosaically in 1989 he would fondly recall the Saturday morning shopping in Tenterfield in his jaunty song 'Shopping On A Saturday' and in 1991, seeing drovers near his then home at Narrandera he would recall similar happy Tenterfield memories that led to the song 'Riverina Drover.'[2] In his anthology *Now and Then* he has a photograph of his childhood self,

---

[1] Zbig Nowara, 'The Gary Shearston Story.' 31st August 2013. p1; Peter Mills, 'Gary Shearston Obituary.' 30th July 2013. p. 1; Karen Shearston, 'Tribute to Gary Shearston.' e-mail 23/7/2013.

[2] Gary Shearston, Album Note to *Only Love Survives.*

driving a buggy in a rural background. This was how he made his way to school, leaving the wagon at a local blacksmith's during school time.[3] He knew the world of which he would sing. By odd coincidence, one of the other great Australian singer-composers, Peter Allen, was also born in the small town of Tenterfield and wrote a popular song 'Tenterfield Saddler' which was inspired by his grandfather, the town saddler. The Shearstons were probably customers. Allen's greatest hit 'I Still Call Australia Home' resembles Shearston's lyrics in its love for Australia. However Peter was born five years after Gary, was taken from Tenterfield as a baby and grew up in Armidale and Lismore.[4]

Gary's Ayrdie childhood also saw the beginning of his involvement with music. Most families in the post-depression era had some access to mass culture. They usually had a radio, attended church and could attend a picture show at least once a week, although the greatest source of mass culture, television, did not start in Australia until 1956 and was initially a luxury. As a result there would still be many nights when families would provide their own musical entertainment, often singing around a piano as the Shearstons did. His mother had musical talent, having played at wartime concerts for troops. Sadly, in 1950 drought forced the Shearstons off their farm and they moved to Sydney. In his seventies Gary released 'Tenterfield,' where he clearly expresses how this loss fuelled a desire for his rural days. He would express his love for the country in many other songs in his career of over fifty years.

Initially Gary, inspired by country music, wanted to be a drummer, but he was unable to afford a kit or more than a few albums. [5] At sixteen he took up guitar playing and left school because he felt he was not learning anything. He then briefly worked at several jobs, including journalism, but became fed up with morbid stories.[6] In 1960 he hosted the musical segment of 'The Channel Nine-Pins' a popular children's game show and went on to work at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre where he was a stage manager, and occasional actor and musical performer.[7] Nearly fifty years later in 'The Curtain Falls' he would sing what it was like to be a desperate, but creative stage actor in the theatrical world. He also worked as a puppeteer and then toured as part of the famous Tintookies puppet show, but it

---

[3] Nowara, p1.

[4] *Wikipedia* 'Peter Allen'; Armidale biographical Display for Peter Allen celebrations c.2010; Anon. *The Al-Time Australian Song Book.* p20.

[5] Nowara, p5; Malcolm J. Turnbull, 'Key Players on the Sydney Coffee Scene 28/9/2013. p3.

[6] Nowara, p1; Mills, p1; Turnbull, p3.

would be in music that he would find his profession.[8] It would seem logical to assume that his interest in folk music began in his Tenterfield days, as this would be an archetypal locale for this genre, being little changed since the colonial times that gave rise to folk music. However even here popular music and country were predominant and he seemed more interested in jazz in adolescence.[9] What happened in Tenterfield was typical of the fate of Australian folk music, which was almost obscure from the 1920s into the late 1950s, covering the time of his childhood and adolescence.

With the spread of contemporary songs through radio, Australian folk music went into a decline that verged on obscurity from around the middle 1920s onwards. Another reason for this waning interest was that folk music was performed acoustically and often slowly, in contrast to the frenetic escapist mood of the 1920s, aptly labelled the Jazz Age.[10] As well as the romantic songs of the crooners and the Broadway shows, other slower 1920s styles such as Ragtime and Blues as well were also usually performed by orchestras - their style and sound were the opposite of folk.

Although almost all styles had romantic songs and instrumentals for dancing, Australian folk music generally depicted a very different world. Folk thrived in a world dominated by clipper ships, convicts, squatters, Irish Republicans, sea shanties, jackaroos, shearing, gold rushes and bushrangers. All these elements seemed archaic and of little relevance to the new Australia that emerged after World War One. The perennial popularity of 'Waltzing Matilda', 'The Road to Gundagai' and perhaps half a dozen others disguised this waning interest to some extent, but until the late 1950s Australian folk music was usually limited to isolated and overly polished examples in the classicists' repertoires, incongruously, Communist Party front groups and also music lessons in some primary schools.[11]

Three foreign born performers had crucial roles in bringing about this change. After Burl Ives toured Australia he was so impressed with Australian folk

---

[9] Nowara, p2; Penny Davies and Roger Ilott, e-mail corrections 16th October 2013. Their comments about what musical styles were popular in around Tenterfield resembles my later experiences in both Allora, South Queensland and rural South Australia, where colonial dancing had to be taught to local residents who saw it as new.

[10] See Scott Fitzgerald's “Echoes of the Jazz Age.” 1931.

[11] Alex Hood was employed by the government to tour schools and in my recollection, by 1962 sheet music and the occasional special class were instituted in schools. Communist families singing patterns were mentioned in 1981 by a former member born into the Communist Party. I lost contact with him twenty years ago so without permission I cannot name him.

music that in 1958 he released an album of twelve Australian folk songs.[12] Given his fame as a singer and the fact that he had just won an Academy Award for acting, Ives made the world (and many Australians) take notice. Gary's friend, Scottish born Lionel Long, released several singles in that year, showing that Australian music had a market. Long would go on to release several folk music albums.[13] A.L. Lloyd was not a celebrity of Ives' stature, but Lloyd, a noted singer, became one of the world's most respected folklorists. Lloyd had spent years as a station hand in western New South Wales.[14] Like Ives and Long, he sang the bush songs he learned during his time there very differently to the polished classicist's manner.

At the time Ives made his record Gary aged nineteen, started performing. Malcolm J. Turnbull in his *History of the Australian Folk Revival* describes Gary's debut in a Brisbane pub as a disastrous warm-up act, saved only by the sympathetic main performer. This debut was followed by singing in RSLs, pubs and clubs, where Gary competed with the rattle of poker machines. Only someone who has been through this process knows how inattentive or unheeding audiences can destroy a performer's confidence. This applies particularly for young beginning performers, causing them to doubt their abilities, but Gary had the courage and will to continue. He must have had tremendous organisational skills and sedulous energy as he was also working as a puppeteer, theatrical person and tv presenter over a short stretch of time as well as singing professionally on the weekends.

He was becoming committed to Australian folk music and thoroughly researched this world, with a keen interest in how the songs were sung by the old bush singers. He listened to A.L. Lloyd's recordings intently as part of his learning process. In his first albums he recorded several song versions which Lloyd had collected.[15] Doctor Edgar Waters of the ANU assisted him with his learning tasks and would later write detailed sleeve notes for several of these early albums. Doctor Waters also provided his own field recordings and those of several others, notably Alan Scott and the writers John Meredith and Russell Ward. Gary also used old recordings, records, sheet music and books which he had found as well as

---

[12] 'Burl Ives.' *Wikipedia.*

[13] 'Lionel Long.' *Wikipedia;* Turnbull, p3 pp1-2.

[14] Edgar Waters, Notes to *Bolters Bushrangers & Duffers* Section 2 p2; Section 3 p1-2 Section 4 p4.

[15] Waters, Notes to *Bolters Bushrangers & Duffers* passim and *Springtime it Brings on the Shearing. Passim.* Gary Shearston. Acknowledgements on the sleeve of *Folk Songs and Ballads of Australia* LP.

conducting interviews.[16] His mentors in these early years included the trade unionist cultural promoter John Baker, the American gospel singer Brother John Sellers and the folk promoter Jim Carter. In early 1963 they played a part in helping Carter start another Sydney venue for folk music in a converted dress factory. The Troubadour Club, (which Gary described as being a shoebox) played a strong part in Gary's success. The club rapidly became popular with patrons (despite the indifferent coffee and cramped conditions) and soon attracted internationally known performers.

Before the end of 1963 Gary's music would be on vinyl and, in 1965, his television show *Just Folk* featuring other Troubadour performers, was popular enough to go from a planned thirteen episodes to twenty six.[17] Gary and Brother John were not only involved in the Troubadour's establishment, but became the opening act, (Gary performing there on Brother John's insistence) then regular performers.[18] The Club was so successful that noted singers Tina Date and Lenore Somerset travelled from Melbourne to perform there. Along with Russell and Meredith, Gary was often at the Sydney Bush Music Club where he met Duke Tritton, there an aged bush singer who also gave him many songs.[19] Gary's contemporaries, the folk singers Don Henderson and Lionel Long, could have been rivals for a man of lesser character, but became his friends. Decades later, in interviews, albums and notes he continued to acknowledge the role others played in his success, often spotlighting their virtues in such songs as 'His Name was Edgar Waters', 'Sail on Brother John', 'Duke's Song', 'A Song for John Baker', 'Hey There Songman' (for Don Henderson) and 'The Harmonica Man' for Richard Brooks, who was his harmonica player on several early albums.

In his music and interviews Shearston was remarkably free of rancour against individuals; even Harold Holt and President Johnson were given monikers (Chief War Cloud and Fawning Dog) in his 1966 attack on the American alliance 'Last Night I Had the Strangest Delirium Tremens'. He never named organisations and religious groups. Only the right wing Senator Barry Goldwater came under explicit personal attack during the 1964 American Presidential campaign in the humorous and sardonic song 'Do You Know Barry?' Shearston's attacks were

---

[16] Karen Shearston; Waters, Notes to *Springtime it Brings on the Shearing.*

[17] Karen Shearston; Gary Shearston excerpt of an NLA interview reproduced by Turnbull, p6.

[18] Gary Shearston in a 2001 interview with Jim Low p2.

[19] Karen Shearston.

usually on organisations, governments and ideas, not people.

When Gary began to sing it was in the new style which eschewed fake posh English accents (for songs about shearers and convicts!) lush orchestration, over-polishing and the operatic style of vocals that had dominated folk music for previous decades. This more authentic, natural sound was what the public wanted to hear. Prior to the folk revival other singers such as Jean Ritchie, Burl Ives, Paul Clayton, Ewan McColl, The Almanac Singers, Theo Bikel and the Seegers were already using this style and were respected in the small folk circles, but mass appeal for such music only began as the fifties ended. In 1960 Fred Foster wrote of the excitement on his first hearing of Paul Clayton's tapes of folk songs sung in the clear, unadorned new style which was just how he imagined folk music should sound.

Soon audiences reacted with enthusiasm to Clayton's performances. Joan Baez's performances at the inaugural Newport Folk Festival in 1959 had elicited the same reaction.[20] Similar musically liberating moments came for many of us

[20] Michael Heatley, *The Newport Folk Festival 1959.* Notnow Music. 2011; Solomon. reproducing a *Tme Magazine*

from that generation and Gary Shearston, Lionel Long, Leonard Teale, Judy Kenny, Don Henderson, Tina Date, Lenore Somerset, Duke Tritton, Alex Hood, Marian Henderson and The Seekers would supply them for many Australians.

The late 1950s would see the revival of folk music in America with the commercial success of the Kingston Trio's rearranged revival of 'Tom Dooley.' In 1959 the Newport Folk Festival had reintroduced folk music to the world. Joan Baez, Odetta, Judy Collins, Shirley Collins, (no relation) would all begin their recording careers in that same year, while Gary Shearston was beginning his commitment to folk music and social change.

The revival of Australian folk music was also part of a political and cultural rebirth after the conservatism that dominated Australian life from Menzies' election in 1949 until the middle of the 1960s. It began slowly in the universities, particularly those of Sydney and Melbourne at the end of the 1950s. It was in Sydney that the extraordinary movement known as The Push developed. Gary, who studied music at Sydney's Conservatory would be greatly influenced by it, as would some of the most important cultural figures to come out of Australia. The informality of the Push, its spontaneity, different influences, dislike of dogma and formality make it difficult to delineate. Like Gary, many of Australia’s most important cultural figures from the 1960s and 1970s had some connection (albeit often loose or inspirational) to The Push. Its ideas and outlook would influence Gary throughout his life.

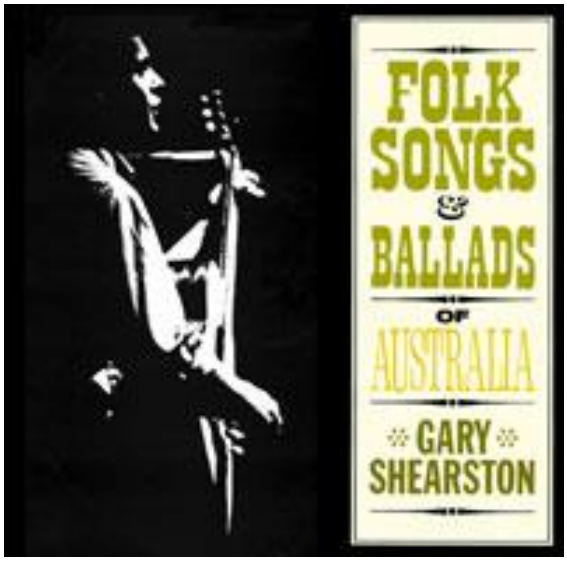
And what were the ideas of The Push? This movement was hard, clear and determined in what it opposed, but inchoate, even sometimes vague on what it supported. It opposed what was conservative, stereotypical, mercenary, puritanical, racist, repressive and authoritarian and looked forward to a libertarian world. If not totally anarchist, it was distrustful not just of government, but of organisations, rules and structures and valued tolerance, experimentation, debate and free speech. Its appearance was usually bohemian, its meeting places pubs, coffee lounges and inner city residences. And the music – at the start – was jazz and folk.

Incongruously many of us learned to love folk music through school programs in extraordinarily repressive environments and listened to the songs again at radical rallies. Two of the most strident Sydney radicals I ever came across began their radical careers by what they considered an act of bravery - going to a

---

excerpt. Author Uncredited.

1966 folk concert.



While in international terms Gary was at the beginning of the folk music revival, he was still far ahead of its Australian flowering. This would be a pattern that would develop throughout his life. As another contemporary folk singer Andrew MacKenzie commented, Gary Shearston was always years, sometimes decades ahead of his time. This applied to more than reviving folk music. When Brother John Sellers introduced him to reggae and Caribbean folk, he was enthused at a time when (apart from a few songs by Harry Belafonte and the Calypso dance) this music remained virtually unknown in the western world until around 1970. Similarly, during his time in London in the early 1970s he tried promoting Aboriginal music, which with few exceptions would have little public success before the 1980s.[21] In 2005 When the Vagabond Crew put out *Lawson,* a collection of thirteen Henry Lawson poems made into modern songs, they were doing what Shearston had done in the 1960s with 'Reedy River' 'The Bush Girl' and 'The Shearer's Dream.' In 'We'll Be Back in Just A Moment After This Important Informative Interlude' Shearston satirised Australian advertising and its faith in materialism more than a decade before Redgum did this with 'Fabulon.'

When Australia's first hippie event happened in Sydney in early 1967 Shearston was there.[22] In 1963 he demonstrated for Aboriginal rights and wrote lyrics with Kath Walker (later Oodgeroo Noonuccal) for 'We are Marching to

[21] Gary Shearston interview with Jim Low. p3.

[22] Thoms, *My Generation* p240.

Freedom'.[23] This was two years before Charles Perkins initiated the freedom rides that began to gain white support for black rights. Other songs such as 'Son of Mine' 'The Land Where the Crow Flies Backwards' 'We Want Freedom' 'Aborigine' and 'Baiame' and statements in support of Aboriginal rights would follow in the years before such attitudes gained widespread support.

He also opposed the death penalty in 'Ballad of Edgar Cooke' and conscription in 'Twenty Summers' and 'The Conscription Ramp'. When eighty-two Australian seamen died in a naval collision in 1964 Gary composed 'The Voyager' which went beyond mere description to question the reasons for war. In Don Henderson's composition 'It's On' Gary lamented violence as a solution to anything. He became a pacifist totally opposed to the Vietnam War when that war had massive Australian support. Even those who opposed it did so on aspects, such as conscription, censorship or the massive bombing of the North. Very few people outside assorted Communist or religious groups took such stands in the first half of the 1960s. When LBJ toured Australia he was welcomed by about half a million: around 10,000 demonstrated against him; at this time 61% still supported the war and conscription initially had 70% support. [24]

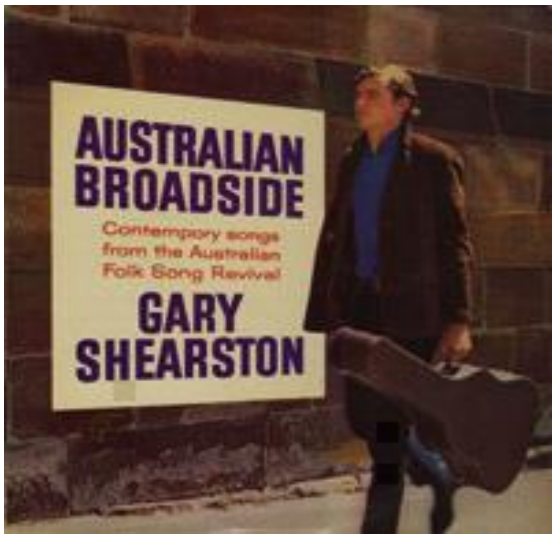
Gary's politics and pacifism were not based in fear, weakness or a blasé or unknowing attitude. While reviewing “The Great Australian Groove' in 2012 Phil

[23] *Ibid.* p138.

[24] Thoms, p214 p150; Horne, p53.

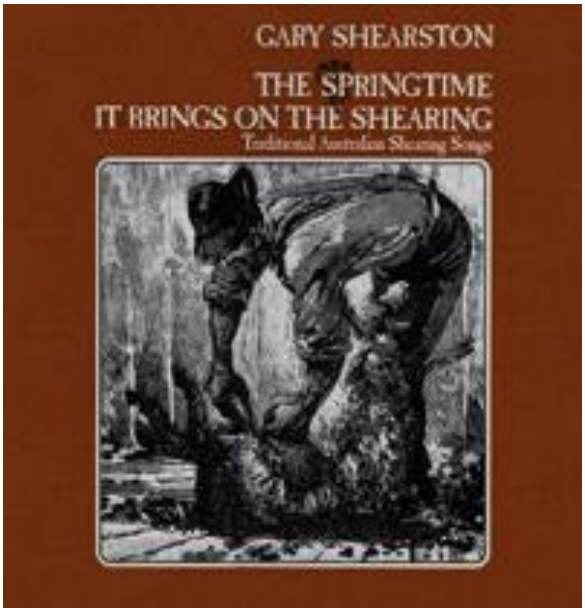
Punch revealed that during these times the police had credible information concerning a death threat made against Gary. There was a possibility that he might be killed during a crowded performance at the Sydney Town Hall, so it was recommended that he not go on. Gary did go on, singing under a spotlight, being passionate clear and uncompromising – and inspiring. That situation took a different type of courage to that of a soldier. In war courage can come out of rage. A soldier's anger can be released by using his weapon and he usually faces a known enemy in company with others. Perhaps it takes not only a different type of courage but more. To calmly play an instrument without faltering under that pressure, to stay alone and still and in clear sight for a long time as a possible target and being in that situation, to then speak of the ideals which caused the threat in the first place.

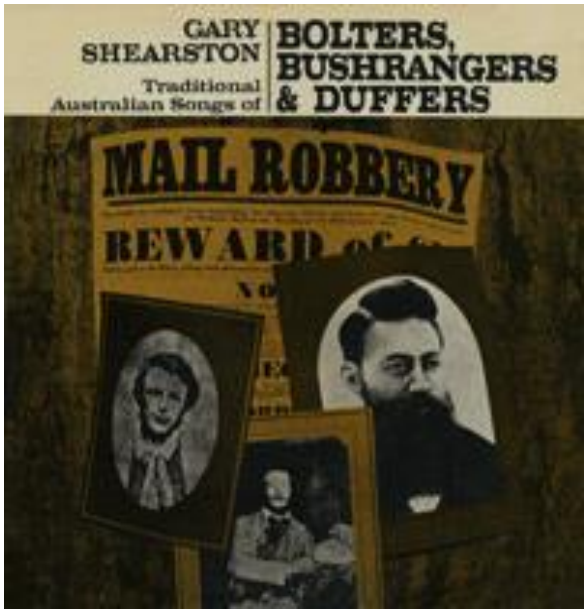
Between picking up a guitar in 1955 and his first recording in 1963 Gary was in his musical apprenticeship. During this time performances in Sydney's folk scene gained him respect and admiration. His first recordings, 'The Ballad of Thunderbolt' and 'The Crayfish Song' were released on a 45rpm on the Leeton label. He changed labels transferring to CBS for his first album. *Folk Songs and Ballads of Australia* was as the title suggests, strongly traditional, although Gary did some reshaping and arranging in order to make the songs sound as they were originally sung on the work stations, camp fires and in town halls.



His second aptly titled album *Songs of Our Time,* also released in 1964, explored the world of protest music, as did his third *Australian Broadside,* released in March 1965. In some ways 1965 was his peak year, as he worked at his own weekly

television show 'Just Folk' released two more albums *The Springtime it Brings on the Shearing* and *Bolters, Bushrangers and Duffers,* was involved in performances and political causes and had a hit single 'Sydney Town' This sedulous behaviour was typical throughout his life.





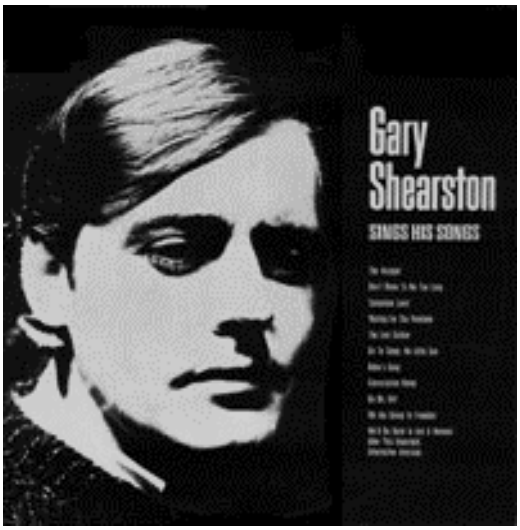
Also typical of his output over the decades of his career were the interests evident in these first three albums: Gary Shearston never abandoned an idea, a style, a theme or a genre - he sometimes set some aside, but always returned to them. From his first three albums up to his last, in his broad themes he was concerned with social justice, work and trade union rights, the lives of the battlers and the underprivileged, romance, love in conflict, nature, humour and satire exposing exploitation. Throughout his music he frequently gave expressions of his love for Australia.

His subject matter was there at the start of his career until the end - bushrangers, seafarers, convicts, lovers, Australian towns and landscapes, Celtic culture, the uselessness of war, consumerism, racism and bureaucracy, the need to survive through optimism and resilience in adversity. In his later years a new theme would emerge. He increasingly sang of loving Christian values as a solution to social and personal problems.

With *The Springtime it Brings on the Shearing* and *Bolters, Bushrangers and Duffers* it seemed that Gary was leaving the world of protest to return to the world of traditional folk, as these two albums resembled his first. In 1966 he changed

direction and record companies again, releasing the self-explanatory *Gary Shearston Sings His Songs*. 'Bulli' had led to a dispute with CBS executives. Under pressure from a mining company did not want his song about the dangerous and exploitative world of coalmining.[25] This song provided another example of his being decades ahead of his time; protests against coalmining only started becoming common thirty years later. Of the twelve songs listed, three were protest songs from his earlier days and three more 'Bulli' and 'Letter from a Soldier' and 'We'll Be Back in Just A Moment After This Important Informative Interlude' were in the protest genre and similar to his earlier releases. This album gained acclaim and notice from overseas, especially for the romantic 'Sometime Lovin' which would be recorded by Peter, Paul & Mary, who would encourage him to visit America.

That song would be among his most acclaimed and had an enduring popularity, but curiously 'Don't Wave to Me Too Long' and 'Go on Girl' - similar romantic songs on the same album and equal in quality to 'Sometime Lovin' ' never received the same acclaim, fame or commercial success. This also applied to his many other fine romantic songs, many composed late in his life. In his personal life Gary would begin a long-term relationship with another prominent figure in The Push, the model Bronwyn Stevens-Jones. They would later marry and divorce.[26]



1967 would see massive changes in direction. His acting career opened up as

25 Gary Shearston Notes to *Abreaction* 2006; Thoms, p215.

26 Gary Shearston Notes to *Abreaction* 2006. Gary refers to Bronwyn as his first wife but does not say when or where they married or when they divorced. Their divorce would be in or soon after the early 1970s, when they returned to Australia and went in different directions.

he portrayed one of the Kelly gang in an ABC television production as well as supplying the music.[27] In his 2011 song 'Truth Is' he said he was sacked from his television program and blacklisted due to his politics. When subsequent events in his life, the mood of the times and similar cases are considered this must almost certainly correct.

His 1967 album *Abreaction* was different to anything he had done before. *Abreaction* tended to stun Australia's folkies as some tracks were pop rock. The invitation to go to America looked good and Shearston and later Bronwyn Stevens-Jones left for America, and a period of great success (from 1964 to 1967) ended.

However that success also brought problems. He was watched by ASIO and considered a dangerous radical. A different danger was that he was labelled 'the Australian Bob Dylan.' This sounds complimentary and sometimes it was intended that way, but in the late 1960s I heard it used derogatively several times by the envious, as if Shearston was merely an imitator. Although there were similarities, there were more differences, making such comparisons unfair.

Before going on with Shearston's life overseas, 1967 makes a good point to consider his similarities and differences with Dylan. Both men were small town boys who came to big cities where they were involved in the folk scene. Both first sang publicly in the late 1950s. Both men wrote protest folk and would present albums that mixed love songs, satire, traditional folk and protest. Both would record many songs about outlaws, be involved in civil rights battles and would go on to folk rock, gospel and rock. Both would become Christians and include a religious element in their later music. He recorded three of Dylan's songs on *Songs of Our Time* and Dylan wrote “I Shall Be Free' before Shearston wrote 'Sydney Town.' Both songs put droll topical satire into the mouth of a simplistic battler. In 1968 both artists shared the same manager, Albert Grossman and both lived near Woodstock New York State.

Such similarities seem conclusive, but Shearston's performing musical career (though not his releases) started a little before Dylan's, not in imitation of it. Several sources state Shearston started singing professionally in the late 1950s; while three specifically mention that he began at the age of nineteen. This indicates that his career started somewhere between January 1958 and January 1959. Although the details are murky and later confused, John Hammond's 1962 sleeve

[27] Thoms, pp245-246.

note states that Dylan's first professional engagement was in a Colorado strip joint in 1959, while others place his debut in that same year with a Minnesota rock group The Shadows, but serious, systematic professional engagements started in 1961: at least two years after Shearston started performing.[28]

Shearston's first album was an attempt to strip Australian folk music back to its authentic roots: Dylan was doing the opposite with American folk, using folk tunes, ideas and phrases and mixing them with his own to take American folk into the new world of the 1960s. In his four folk albums from 1961 to 1964, only the first, *Bob Dylan,* contains traditional folk songs - and they have been rearranged by Dylan. Although he recorded many folk songs between 1969 and 1971, few would be released: notably 'Copper Kettle' on *Self Portrait* in 1970 and 'Shenandoah' in *On the Groove* in 1988. Others were out-takes or held back from release until 2012/2013. Dylan was an acoustic performer influenced by folk rather than a folk singer. He was heavily influenced by Woody Guthrie to the extent that he hailed Guthrie as the greatest living human, the world's most godly man and he imitated his singing voice, rapidly learning around two hundred of his songs.[29] Shearston was never influenced by any one individual to that extent. At the end of his *Chronicles Volume One* Dylan recalls that folk music was a paradise he had to leave and in 1965 he did just that.[30] Protest songs were also left behind, with the exceptions of 'George Jackson' in 1971 and 'Hurricane' five years later.

Although he never recorded an album consisting totally of folk tunes after 1965, Shearston never left folk music, continuing to include folk songs in his releases forty years on and writing socially aware songs. Many of his later recordings were in the folk and folk rock genre. In subject matter those who compare Dylan and Shearston miss one of the most obvious differences: so many of Shearston's songs reveal a deep love of Australia its landscapes, locales, people and Australian ways. There is no equivalent in Dylan's work.

Dylan and Shearston had widely differing singing styles, even if their subject matter was similar. Compare Dylan's fast paced, rasping, snarling rage and hatred which allows for no questioning in 'Masters of War' with Shearston's calm, regretful, thoughtful questioning of the reasons why conflicts happen in 'The Voyager.' Their singing styles would differ for much of their careers. Especially at

---

[28] For Shearston: Turnbull part 3 p1; Cashmere p2; Nowara p2; For Dylan: Sleve notes to *Bob Dylan* 1962 lp Stacey Williams.

[29] See also Dylan's composition “Song to Woody.'

[30] Dylan, p292.

the start of his career (and probably in reaction to over-polished performers) Dylan was often musical roughness incarnate, while Shearston was always measured, polished and pleasingly smooth.

So did Shearston owe anything to Dylan? Indeed! Like many he did. Like so many others in the new folk music he owed Dylan the chance to be an international success, for when John Hammond, Albert Grossman and then Joan Baez promoted Dylan, who soon became a commercial success, the field was open, indeed inviting, to other singer-composers in the folk tradition.[31] The studios were now willing to take chances on people who had been singing in the folk clubs for years. An array of talent that still amazes fifty years on emerged in the middle 1960s and Shearston was part of that. Rarely before has a cultural field produced so much great talent at one time: the poets, playwrights and artists of the Elizabethan era, England's Regency poets, the pre-Raphaelite artists and poets, Ireland's Celtic twilight, Russia's writers from around 1840 to around 1910, the Russian and German film-makers of the 1920s, the English language novelists and Hollywood film-makers of the inter-war years – all produced a great and similar cultural flowering. However the acceleration of the folk revival caused by Dylan's rise to stardom was more concentrated; consider the massive number of talented singer-songwriter guitarists who emerged after Dylan's rise to stardom in 1962 up to 1967, when psychedelic music took over and folk rock became more rock than folk. Even so, for a decade beginning at the end of the 1950s an abundance of talent emerged from the campuses and coffee houses into the record industry.

Peter Paul & Mary, Barry McGuire, John Stewart and Ian & Sylvia released their first albums in 1962. Tom Rush, Judy Henske, the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, Hedy West and Dave Van Ronk did the same the following year. Shearston, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Julie Felix, Simon & Garfunkel, Donovan, Phil Ochs and Tom Paxton made their first albums in 1964.

In 1965, the same year that Dylan and the Byrds Jim (later Roger) McQuinn separately started folk rock, Marianne Faithful, the Seekers, Eric Andersen, and Richard & Mimi Farina released folk albums. Gordon Lightfoot, John Fahey, Joni Mitchell, John Renbourn, Bill Staines, Ralph McTell, Tim Hardin, Leonard Cohen, Robin Williamson, Mike Heron, Richie Havens, Sandy Denny, Martin Carthy, Martyn Wyndham-Read, Van Morrison, Janis Ian and Bert Jansch would release their first music by the end of 1967.[32] In their tunes, lyrics, their social position and

[31]Baez, p84 pp90-91; Blake, pp28-29 71 pp106-107.

[32] This lists is compiled from the works of Roxon and Strong and a few Wikipedia entries.

outlook these artists all resembled Dylan in some way. This meant that several had to endure labels that went too far – Scotland, England, Ireland and Canada also had singers labelled national Dylans. Others were anointed 'the new Dylan" or even worse "another Bob Dylan." Perhaps a youth in Kyrgyzstan who is strumming some instrument in protest is being acclaimed as Kyrgyzstan's Bob Dylan.

In 1967 Shearston seemed close to becoming one of the greatest of these new names l in music. As Phil Punch points out in his review of *The Great Australian Groove* Bob Dylan, Gordon Lightfoot and John Denver all had tremendous career launches when Peter, Paul & Mary released versions of their compositions and Gary had just experienced this. Albert Grossman, the world's most famous and successful manager and promoter in folk music and rock, had prepared a contract for Gary with Warner Brothers. Grossman had promoted Dylan when even Joan Baez initially found him unprepossessing, and few could tolerate his scruffiness and his rough style. Joan Baez recalls in *And a Voice to Sing With* that in his early days Dylan was often booed off stage. Shearston's performances were in contrast to Dylan's at this time. Grossman had also done much to develop Peter Paul & Mary and with Gordon Lightfoot, Janis Joplin and Todd Rundgren also among his acts, nobody could say he lacked an eye for talent. Unlike most managers who were supplicants to the record companies, Grossman's reputation and successes made them defer to him.

Unfortunately adverse ASIO and American intelligence reports meant that Gary was considered an undesirable alien. Gary, his wife Karen Shearston, Albie Thoms and others independently stated this. Thoms who knew Gary at the time, added that the way Communists participated in both Aboriginal rights and the anti-war movement fuelled intelligence fears.[34] The intelligence experts need not have worried: Gary was not a joiner or a dupe and the Communist Party members were generally tired, aged, marginalised people who spent much of their time and energy on splits within the organisation. In 1965 only one Communist was on the Vietnam Action Committee. Save Our Sons and Youth Against Conscription had separate existences as respectable people from mainstream Australia became involved in these organisations.[35] The Communist Party had little credibility even among Sydney's radicals, who were a long way from the iron discipline, dogmatic Marxist outlook and authoritarian ways of Communism. One incident says it all: in 1968

---

[34] Thoms, p244; Karen Shearston; Nowara p2; Mills p1.

[35] Horne, *Time of Hope* p52; This was also my personal impression.

the Communist Party decided to lure in youth with a prominent rock band playing at a prominent Sydney location. Drinks and food awaited – and went stale. According to the organiser himself not one person turned up and he got drunk on the waiting alcohol.[36] Even when the moratorium marches began two years later and hundreds of thousands marched, various communist groups picked up perhaps hundreds, if that.

For about a year Gary based himself in London until eventually efforts by Senator Edward Kennedy eventually gained Gary and Bronwyn American entry. They lived at Woodstock, New York State, where he worked on his album. However he was not allowed to publicly perform in the USA.[37] Albums depend on performances for publicity, promotion and sales and this may be why his album was not released. Alternatively it may have been political pressure or studio self-censorship. There had been the earlier case with the powerful CBS under pressure from a coalmining company caving in over his song 'Bulli' – and Gary's refusal to cave in.

Gary and Bronwyn were hit by personal tragedy when she suffered a miscarriage and in 1971 they returned to Australia. Nearly forty years later in 'The Norwich Bells' Gary would appear to be singing of a fictional couple dealing with the death of a young child and state with grief that only those who had experienced such a loss would know the extent of that grief and the pain that would never go away. The song was not fictional. Years later he told Penny Davies and Roger Ilott that the song was about what happened to him and Bronwyn and their child. Albie Thoms met them and noted their sadness and that Bronwyn seemed relieved to be back in Australia, but Gary was ambivalent and restless. Bronwyn began working in the organic food industry, opening a catering service and then a café in Balmain, while Gary returned to England.[38] He had spent most of his life between 1968 and 1972 in America, making tremendous efforts to be successful, but found every effort thwarted. His later songs 'Truth Is', 'Passport Undertow' and 'Another Song' would describe this struggle, his bitterness and the resilience he found to continue on with his music after this defeat.

His personal defeat in America was contemporary with political and cultural

---

[36] This was recounted by the youth recruiter involved in 1973. Around that time Healyite Trotskyists had a similar experience. Few 1970s teenagers want to pop under a gigantic hammer and sickle flanked by portraits of Marx and Lenin.

[37] Karen Shearston; Nowara, p2.

[38] Thoms, p401 p404 p427.

victories in Australia, albeit of a mixed kind. The world of The Push was a victim of its own success. 1971 marked the crest of Australian radicalism: even before Whitlam's December 1972 electoral victory on a radical platform, radical politics was losing its idealistic zest and its clarity. What the radicals were once against was either fading or had gone; the amorphousness of 1960s radicalism meant that there was no clear or united positive aim. The radicals had achieved much: the narrow, isolationist, racist, conservative and dreary world of the Menzies era had, among the younger people in the cities at least, given way to the permissive society, one that was multi-cultural, vibrant, questioning of all values, tolerant, saw itself as part of the world and welcoming of new ideas. Battles against censorship, gender stereotyping, puritanism, cultural conservatism, racism, Aboriginal discrimination and the war in Vietnam were being won – so what need was there for a movement? Many in the Push, particularly their older members, seemed overwhelmed and surprised by their success and puzzled by what to do with it. This was my impression at the few meetings and Push events I attended between 1970 and 1972.

The majority of once energetically radical Australians either went into rural sustainability, drugs or alcohol, travel or quiet careers. For those who remained in radical politics a split developed between those who saw a Labor victory as a solution and those who turned to the dogmatic far left: the former often became well-off academics, bureaucrats or politicians while the latter ended up as marginalised, squabbling sectarians. A few from either side would eventually drift to the corporate right. The fading of this milieu meant the fading of Gary's base. In “Betwixt and Between' he does not specifically mention the Push but he seems to refer to the movement as he condemns those who sell out for money, but also laments the way ideals failed at the first hurdle and this led to narrowness, isolation and an inability to compromise. This describes exactly what happened to radicals in Australia in the later 1970s. Towards the end of his life Gary explicitly called for society to turn to the Push's libertarian ideals in 'When the Push Came to Shove.'

When Gary moved back to England in 1972, this became a base as he travelled and toured around Europe. Some of the reworked songs from the Warners album appeared on *Dingo* in 1974, Gary's first album in seven years. In style it resembled *Gary Shearston Sings His Songs* more than any other album and by a great irony contained his worldwide hit, his laid back version of Cole Porter's “I Get A Kick Out of You.' To some extent it was a serenade to his new partner Kristiana Maria Konchevsky, who has her name mentioned in his version of the song. It was also unplanned, a song performed at a farewell party for expatriate

Australians about to return home.[39] Gary tended to trust his compositions and recordings to arrangers and Phil Chapman, who was on Dingo's production team was one he praised for his abilities. As a result, when Chapman disliked the initial recording, finding it soporific, he spent a Sunday paring it back then changing the backing, bringing in the violins and guitar at the start. He thought it then to be passable and the producer Hugh Murphy agreed. They thought they were hiding the track by putting it on Side Two of the LP and were dumbfounded when Tony Stratton-Smith chose it for the single.[40]

What became Gary's big global hit was unplanned. Serendipity worked, for by the middle of the 1970s laid-back songs were again popular: Bette Midler's career also began with great success because her albums had hits by the great American composers of decades long past. The single reached number seven in the United Kingdom's top forty list. Ironically Gary's biggest commercial hit was in a style he had never recorded before and seldom explored later in his fifty year recording career.

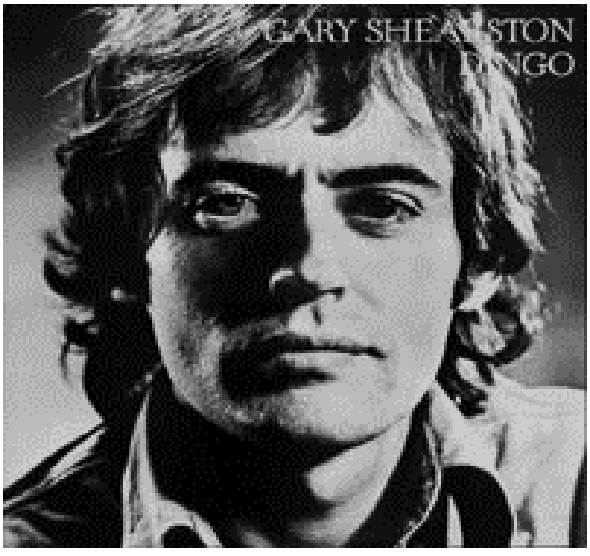
His next album *The Greatest Stone on Earth and Other Two Bob Wonders*

[39] Gary Shearston, Notes in *Now and Then.*

[40] Phil Chapman, *Pop Singles* 28th September 2013; Interview with Jim Low2 2-3.

(1975) resembled *Dingo* in that so many songs were uniquely Australian: Gary himself noted the irony of composing songs about Aborigines while living in New York and London.[41]

His time in the USA and Europe would also lead to songs that clearly came from his time there. 'The Lightkeeper of America' and 'Irish Girls Will Steal Your Heart Away' are salient examples, although with the latter song Irish mythology seems to be the inspiration. The song sounds so authentic it initially seemed a very old traditional Irish song. Apparently Shearston had immersed himself in the culture during his stay in Ireland. 'Back of Beyond' with its religious imagery was little noticed, but that religious imagery would indicate a major trend that emerged in his twenty-first century music. After 'I Get A Kick Out of You.' he released 'Dingo' and other songs from his 1970s albums as singles, but they did not have the same impact. As Spencer Leigh, noted in his obituary article, when Gary tried the winning formula of 'I Get A Kick out of You' with 'Without A Song' inexplicably there was no repeat of the first commercial success. Two other singles were not released on albums, an acoustic reworking of Procol Harum's 1967 psychedelic hit 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' in 1976 and a Celtic reworking of 'Wild Mountain Thyme' two years later. Inexplicably neither song became a big hit and in 1978 he briefly returned to Australia.[42]



[41] Interview with Jim Low. 3

[42] Martin C. Strong, *The Great Discography*. 2010 p532.

Some of his European time went in writing articles and researching film work, including a film on Burke and Wills. In the late 1980s he spent eighteen months writing a 448 page novel *Balkenna w*ith Mike Thomas.[43] He also spent time in monasteries at Assisi and Farnborough in the United Kingdom, studied Zen Buddhism and was involved in Anglican Church work in England; he was developing a more spiritual mentality. This would emerge in a more certain form on his return to Sydney in the late 1980s when he worked at an Anglican healing ministry at Railway Square, Sydney.[44] Gary had been born into a Christian Anglican family and was returning to his roots.

His return to Australia would see 1989 as another of his prolific years as *Balkenna* was published that June and *Aussie Blue,* his first album since 1975, was released to acclaim. As with his previous two albums *Dingo* and *The Greatest Stone on Earth and Other Two Bob Wonders* Shearston celebrated Australian identity and experience through both the archetypal and the ordinary. One such track 'Shopping on a Saturday' had a jaunty at times even exuberant nostalgia, bound to make it popular: it won an award for the best new song at the 1990 Tamworth Country Music Awards. The title track celebrated Australian icons with, but at times seemed wry, verging on sardonic in its tone. As in other earlier albums there were sensitive, thought provoking love songs and an adaptation from a Henry Lawson poem, but the album concluded with something new: the blues style appeared on some tracks. It would reappear and become more distinctive in his later music. More importantly a song entitled 'The Holy Spirit of Redemptive Love' indicated where Shearston's life and music were going.

1989 ended with Gary working on a song and performing to benefit the Newcastle earthquake victims.[44] In 1991 he relocated to Narrandera and studied for the ministry under Bishop Barry. He was ordained as an Anglican Minister in June of the next year.[4 5] For several years his ministry was in the Riverina, with five of those years at the isolated plains town of Hay, where he married Karen and where their son, Luke was born.[46] In 1998 he would leave the Riverina to serve in Bangalow in northern New South Wales, residing there until December 2003.[47]

---

[43] Karen Shearston.

[44] *Ibid*.

[45] *Ibid.*

[47] *Ibid*.

On the surface he was in a world opposed to his 1960s days in the Push. Could there be any more conservative occupation in a more conservative locale than being an Anglican churchman in blue-ribbon National Party areas? Despite surface appearances in both his interviews and lyrics, from the 1980s until his death Gary demonstrated that he still adhered to the ideals of fairness and social justice and a dislike of tyranny – the things which had always motivated him. In his 2009 album notes to a reissue of *Abreaction* he stuck by his opposition to the Vietnam War. His later albums continued his 1960s stand against racism, war and exploitation, but he added environmental devastation, greed, pessimism, materialism and Reaganite politics as problems to be overcome.

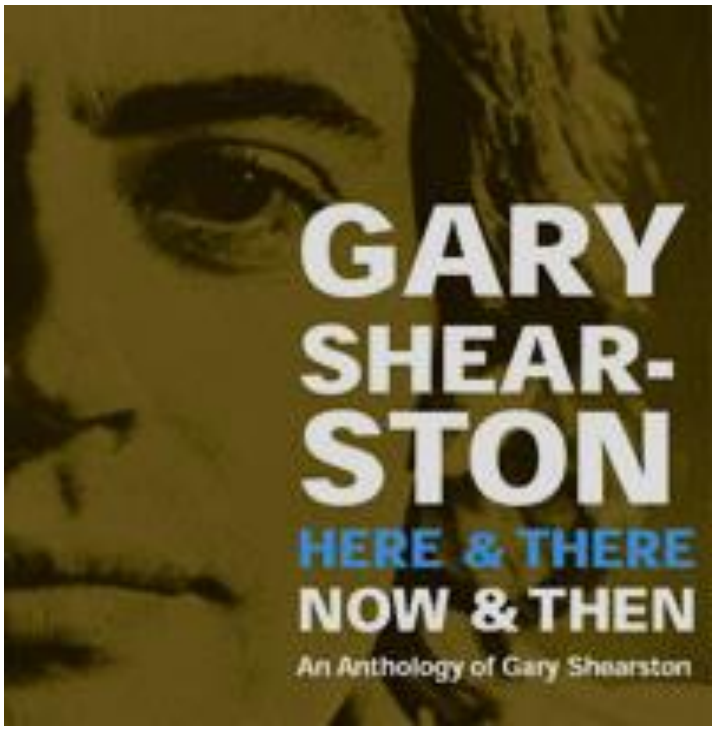
His 2005 song about a then recent naval disaster ‘The Sea Kings' resembled his 1964 song 'The Voyager′ in subject matter, sombre tone and his attitude to the military world. His tribute to Charles Perkins 'Hey Charlie Perkins' was in the same style as his earlier songs about Aboriginal rights and struggles. In his 2001 interview with Jim Low he praised protest music as a way to reveal hidden agendas, lies and exploitation. In that same interview he stated that church work left little time for recording - he now taught and sang music rather than recorded it. During his ministry he instituted the 'Blessing of the Animals' service and composed a version of the sung Eucharist which spread across many of Australia's Anglican churches.[48]

[48] *Ibid.*

Despite his heavy workload 2001 was another musically productive year. His new album *Only Love Survives* contained twelve songs, ten of which were new compositions. His British born daughter Bonnie had never seen Australia, so he wrote about what she would see in an exuberant welcoming song in 'Pretty Bonnie.' One other new song 'Riverina 1984' was co-written with Bishop Barry Hunter. The traditional song 'Streets of Forbes' was rearranged by Shearston, but as he states in the sleeve notes, all remaining songs were his compositions. In this album he continued with several of his usual themes and developed some new directions. 'Foreign Strand' combined his championing of the working class with his interest in Irish culture. Here he sings in the persona of an Irish immigrant forced to work in England as Ireland had little employment. 'Riverina Drover' succeeded as another of his modern folk songs that celebrated the ways of life of rural Australians without falsity. Lawson's influence in this song is evident as it is in his tribute to Don Henderson “Hey There Songman.' 'Forty Days' and 'Riverina 1984' developed the religious strand in his music that was already evident in “Back of Beyond' and 'The Holy Spirit of Redemptive Love.' 'Bonnie’s Lullaby', 'Foreign Strand' and 'Song for Kimio Eto' were more fine examples of Shearston's ability to create lullabies or songs with a lullaby feel. 'Bonny's Lullaby' had already been used during her babyhood, so he concluded the album with it. 'Pretty Bonnie' and 'Love, Don't Ever Make a Fool of Me Again' developed his musical country-rock strand without falling into the usual traps which come with so much country music – right wing ideas, maudlin outlooks, faked accents, simplistic ideals and overly sentimental, overly glossy presentations. Three songs on *Only Love Survives*

revealed new musical directions. 'Song for Kimio Eto' successfully used Japanese music and in 'The Man I Might Have Been' Shearston finally becomes introspective – after reaching his sixties. As the title suggests, the song was one of regret, but in 2003 he would see one cause of regret turned to satisfaction. He was able to purchase Ayrdie and return to his childhood home in New England. Although he had retired from full-time parish work he continued as a locum priest in the Anglican dioceses of Armidale and Brisbane.

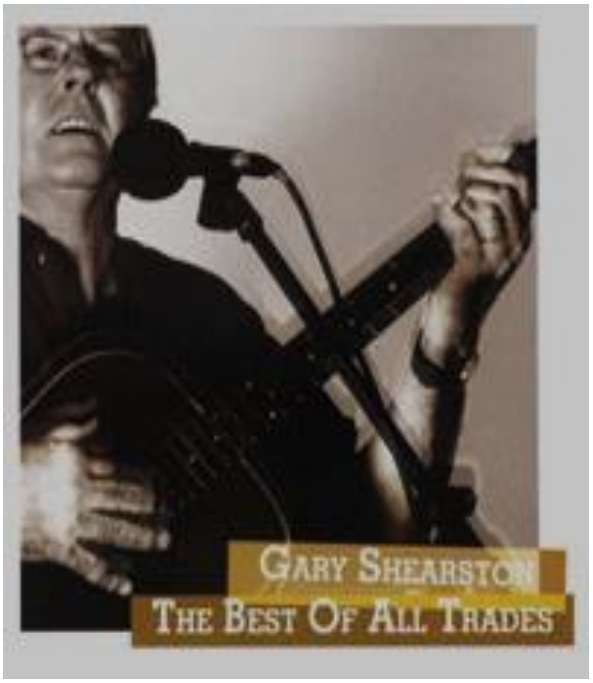
During some months of 2005 he served as a minister to the southern inland Queensland town of Stanthorpe. While there met folk musicians Penny Davies and Roger Ilott who would frequently work as session musicians with him in his later albums and who would also take on many of the technical aspects of production in their Stanthorpe studio. [5]Although many writers believed that Gary's religious work was solely within the Anglican Church, Gary's final religious role was as a locum in the Uniting Church of Tenterfield. [49] In his religion as in his music, Gary was eclectic, he had been interested in Buddhism in the 1980s and in his New England years worked with Anglicans, Catholics and the Uniting Church in several different fields. [50]



[49] Karen Shearston.

[50] Buddhism is mentioned by Nowara p3; The author spoke to several New England Christians in telephone conversations who separately mentioned his involvement in different denominations.

In 2007 Stuart Heather organised a collection of Gary Shearston's work from 1964 until 2001. This is aptly entitled *Here & There Now & Then: An Anthology of Gary Shearston.* Heather had to restore many of the songs from old vinyl records and old master tapes. He provided several notes to songs while also using some original sleeve notes, while Gary added others. The anthology sold well and introduced Gary's early work to a new generation. In the introduction to the collection Warren Fahey accurately described Gary's personal and musical virtues and stated that his resonant music had withstood the toughest test - that of time. With equal accuracy he also stated that two CDs could barely do Shearston's career justice. Certainly no included song sounded out of place. There were some previously unreleased traditional songs, first recorded in 1966 'Stirling-O, 'The Old Viceroy' and 'John Mitchell' and also 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' and these were welcome and of high quality. They raised the question of the existence of other early recordings, but even if fragile, brittle tapes survived, where would they be located and who would have copyright? Fortunately Stuart Heather was able to restore all Gary's early album releases from *Folk Songs and Ballads* up to *Dingo* and re-release them as CDs. Today all Gary's album releases are available on CDs.



Initially *Here & There Now &Then: An Anthology of Gary Shearston* looked like a summary of his life in music, at sixty-eight and in professional semi-retirement that would be a reasonable assumption - for anybody else. Most people

in their seventies who are in semi-retirement want a quiet easy life: Gary chose rock. Initially this seems unwise: the musical world is full of aged 1960s performers who have fading fame but now lack the energy, imagination and freshness music requires. Gary proved he had all three in abundance and his twenty-first century music shows a man whose talent was still developing. His musical output in the last three years of his life was another prolific period: except His for 2010 every year from 2009 till 2013 saw a new album, none with fewer than fourteen songs. The new direction started with *The Best of All Trades*. At seventy his voice was as strong as ever. He developed previously little-used aspects of his music. Many of these songs were styled in a blues mode, while the lyrics were now often strongly religious. Though he would still expose, protest and analyse, now he offered Christian love as a solution.

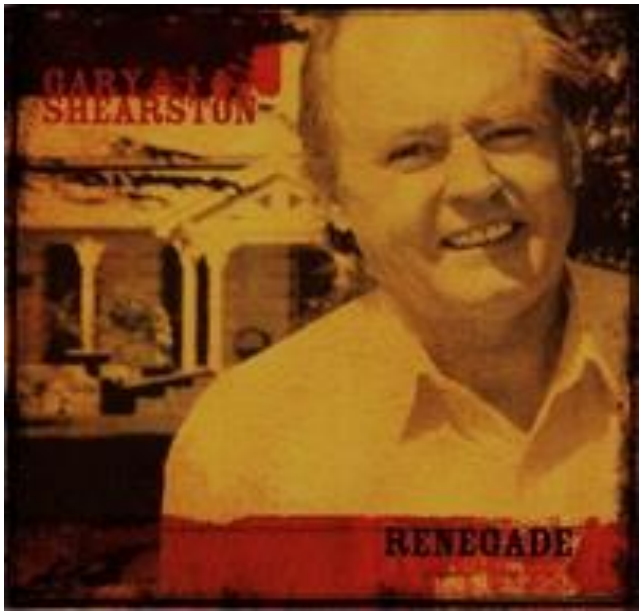
The title song clearly developed from a 2001 interview with Jim Low. Here Gary referred to how a song may develop from a sermon – or be a whole sermon.[51] Several of these songs give this impression, and like sermons are sometimes didactic, but have a sincerity, a compassion, a clarity and modesty that make them work. Gary permeates the album with the idea within the title – which in his lyrics and the interview Gary credits to Hilaire Belloc – that composing songs was the best of all trades and the second best was to sing them. He expands on Belloc's idea, singing that songs should inspire hearts, minds and souls to make a better world for everyone: he would be happy to hear people singing his songs to make that happen.[52]

In 2011 *Renegade* would provide some of the most optimistic songs of his career – and some of the most pessimistic and tragic. One song contains both of these elements. This is the ultimately upbeat, cheery 'Say Yeah.' This starts with lists of the negatives and in life and the disaffections with those negatives. The chorus and the second half then offers the solution of the title as a cure, to say yes to being disaffected, to be aware that a problem exists, then positives are listed and the affirmation is to say yeah. 'She's a Classic' appeals as a brief jubilant, merry paean to an unnamed woman. In 'Paint Me a Painting Painter' Gary celebrates creativity, offering to exchange a created song for the painting to come which should reflect the artist's heart and soul. This sounds like a celebration of the famed artist, cartoonist and songwriter of the Push, his friend Martin Sharp, who outlived

[51] Interview with Jim Low. p3.

[52] *Ibid.*

him by only five months.



As the title of 'Live in Love' suggests love is the solution. Gary sings of how he is a holy terror and a bushranger in 'a world of woe' but then lovingly describes rural Australia, its flora, fauna and landscapes. He then offers seeds, as if these descriptions are seeds to spread love. Perhaps they are literal seeds of the plants he has described, as the placing of seeds beside descriptions of plants makes this seem a literal offer. However he then describes being offered gold for seeds, which sounds as if the seeds are his songs. In the last verses seeds then also seem like his attempts to spread love. No interpretation is invalid: Gary has offered an image structured for multiple interpretations. 'His Name Was Edgar Waters' commemorates his early mentor who died in 1965, but while this not a sad song, all the remaining tracks have a strong element of sadness about them.

In 'Gone Missing' the narrator takes on the persona of a family member fretting for a missing relative. 'And A Butcherbird Overhead Sang' examines the motivations of a suicide. 'But You Don't Know Me' describes the sad realities of a failing relationship. 'About The Situation' sounds strongly autobiographical, despite the way the narrator here sounds working class. He starts and ends with the desperate poverty of many Australians, being just ahead of the bills and a meal away from starving. He describes the tediousness and bullying involved in factory line assembly and turns to religion only to find it full of bossy mercenaries

manipulating the desperate. Descriptive songs about exploitation become his way of fighting back, but don't stop his dire poverty. It could be a description of many Australian lives since the onset of the 2008 recession.

Other songs mix optimism and sadness. 'Truth Is' describes Gary's sad and damaging battles with government authority in the 1960s and how this nearly destroyed his career, recalling in the last verse, how he returned to performing and personal growth. In 'Hey Little Lassie' he appeals to youth to fight the world's exploitation. Similarly 'Renegade' starts by listing his debilitating illnesses and losses that have come with old age. In subsequent verses he then puts himself down, but in the chorus he makes it clear he can still tell the truth and does not care if he is labelled a renegade; he will battle his faults and has virtues that he will strive to practice. His songs will be uplifting.

The Great Australian Groove (2012) is a bluesy rock album where many themes that had motivated his life's work reappear: exposing exploitation, ('Passport Undertow') lost love ('A Kindness to Keep' and 'Down the Murrumbidgee') the need for love, ('Need Me Some Love' and 'What is Love?') celebrating Australia ('Strolling' 'The Great Australian Groove') showing resilience ('Use Your Imagination' 'Never Give In') Aboriginal exploitation ('Strangers' 'Frost Across the Tablelands') Christianity ('There Came a Criminal') and personal experience ('Phantoms of Night' 'From Goodness Knows Where') Several of these songs would blend these themes. The title track would be about his life and work as much as it is about Australia and like nearly every track, would draw on resilience, awareness and determination as a way to win against life's battles.

'In all Humility' has a structure and idea very similar to 'Say Yeah.' In the first half of the lyrics a verse is given to each to the vices of narcissism, racism and nationalism, describing their effects. In the song's second half Gary counters these vices with the virtues of optimism, pacifism and altruism, calling for a resurrection of these qualities. In “When the Push comes to Shove' he describes the current society which has replaced the 1960s ideals with greed and envy. This is an ugly vision and he wants a return to the ideals of the Push.

On *Reverently* which was almost finished in his last days, Gary would go out of life on a win. As always, he does new things in some songs, while continuing established patterns in others. The new element here is his singing of contrasts between the city and the country. In the title track and the last track 'The Old New England Range' he contrasts his experiences in travel around the world, from the great cities to the wilderness, concluding that the vision of the blue mountain

ridges in the distance will always stay with him despite the many remarkable places he has been. The city–country contrast also becomes evident when 'Why Don't You Come on Down?' and 'Riverina Dreaming' are compared. The first is an appeal to go to hear the 'sophisticated blues with an urban feel' at a blues club and has a blues backing which becomes mesmerising. The most powerful track on the album is 'Riverina Dreaming.' It works more as a poem than a song: the music is not so much a tune, but mesmerising backing for lyrics of fragmented images of Riverina life. The music might not seem as clever as it is to those who have not been in the Riverina on a hot day when the warm air, stillness and cicadas create a similar lulling feel. Anyone who has ever lived there will identify with Gary's descriptions and thoughts.

Two of the tracks 'John O' Donohue' and 'Hooley' concern Ireland and like 'Irish Girls' sound traditional, but were composed by Gary. In 'About Just Loving You' Gary wishes he could write the world's most beautiful song so as to express his love. How any song could be more beautiful than 'Irish Girls,' 'Sometime Lovin,' Tenterfield,' 'Song for Kimio Eto,' "Go to Sleep My Little Son,' 'Pretty Bonnie,' 'Don't Wave to Me to Long,' 'Love Don't Make a Fool of Me Again,' 'I Get a Kick Out of You' or 'About Just Loving You' itself, is not explained and possibly can never be.

In 'Love's Healing Balm' Gary calls to live in love as a cure for grief. Here the song has a light jaunty feel - the chorus reinforces its hopeful message. He

encourages the listener to try love because “love wins more times than it loses. Give it a go you never know you could be a winner it chooses.”

The title of Gary's last album released in the year after his death, *Pathways Of a Celtic Land* (2014) suggests a change of style and topic, but no, Gary used his folk-rock style to focus on the same subjects as in earlier albums. In the title track he conjures up assorted traditional Celtic images, pagan rites among standing stones, the landscape of Cornwall and stained glass windows in old churches. He then contrasts those images with images of eucalypts in the misty rain and swagmen, images from New England, Australia. This contrast could have been kitschy, but by making it emphatic and saying why he contrasts the two, Shearston avoids that. He “is on a quest to understand how our ancestry began.” With a high proportion of the population of Celtic descent and Celtic culture very much alive in the area, the song works – without a single Celtic instrument or tune. Gary could still turn out a shrewd phrase as he does in “Be a Saviour to the World’ where he sings of that philosophical con, progress. This song seems a response to statements that he was preaching and trying to be a saviour. He tells people to be saviours and that the world needs saving, giving many reasons why. As in so many albums he includes a jaunty love song, ‘Zuza’ and a more gentle acoustic love song ‘Except.’ In ‘Slow Going’ he cheerfully celebrates the virtues and rewards of going slowly in a world where the pressure is on to rush. Like several of his later albums *Pathways Of a Celtic Land* contains several songs about the need for love and fairness to cure

the world's problems. Although his voice no longer had quite the same strength and resonant timbre it had in the 1960s, he permeated this work with a cheery optimism rare among the old.

Whatever his failures, Gary Shearston not only avoided becoming a cranky, bitter old man, he stayed a cheerful one, celebrating life as a miracle. Gary lived what he preached. Penny Davies and Roger Ilott recall him in the studio happily rocking while listening to the master tape of *Reverently* with a beatific smile.[53]

He was still working on music until his very last days. On June 26th 2013 a version of 'Witnessing' went on U-tube. Poignantly the title song on *Reverently* gives an overview of his life. In the last song 'The Old New England Range', Gary and the chorus sing promises of more songs to come – but for Gary that would not be. Roger Illott and Penny Davies were expecting Gary to be at the studio on July 2nd to listen to the final mix of *Reverently* and also to record the album's last song, 'Letter To A Friend' for the almost completed next album, *Pathways Of A Celtic Land,* but Gary never made it. On July 1st Gary was at his home at Ayrdie, putting the finishing touches to 'Letter To A Friend' when he was hit by a massive haemorrhage. He was taken to Armidale Hospital, where he died that night.

Although the mass media, at least initially, did not give Gary's life and career much coverage, through the social media, magazines and events people did. Friends and associates in Sydney organised a large memorial concert at Petersham in August, many tribute articles went of the internet, several radio stations broadcast old interviews and I had a two hour special commemorative show on community radio. At Tenterfield the large community hall was packed on a weeknight for a commemoration of his life and work: Luke and Bonnie Shearston were among the performers.

In putting together this small biography scores of interviews, recollections, reviews, articles, and books had to be considered, most were used. The examined lyrics came to over a hundred and sixty songs and all this combined information hit me with a singular fact: nobody said a word against Gary Shearston except Shearston himself. In his 2011 song 'Renegade' he says that at times he was "nuts" and his family thought him temperamental, "slightly deranged" and a "beast." In that same song he claims to have had many faults, but from the evidence ingratitude, cowardice, laziness, racism, meanness, shallowness, deviousness, dishonesty, slanderous tendencies and callousness were definitely not among them.

---

[53] Davies and Ilott, e-mail of October 16th 2013.

His life was dedicated to developing his gifts, protecting our heritage, fighting injustice, helping others, uplifting our spirits and celebrating what was good in life.

*

Author's Note

This biography was begun soon after Gary Shearston's death. Since then two of his albums were released and information about them has been added. A new proof reading lead to corrections, improvements and additions. Illustrations have been enlarged, so pagination will be different from earlier editions.

Copyright

Garry Victor Hill asserts the moral right to copyright of the written text of this work. Short quotations for critical or academic purposes are allowed. Sales by any means or storage in any electronic system without the expressed permission of the author is a copyright violation. ©c

The illustrations are from free access internet sites. Most of these illustrations are from Google options; these are compiled by generic topics. They begin 'Images of…' They request feedback, which becomes a specific request for usage and if granted, they are copied. Others have been used following requested copyright steps for inclusion. Under Australian law illustrations can be used for review or educational purposes by qualified teachers. Either way, they should not be copied from this work. The author does not hold the copyright to any illustration. If any illustration has been put on free access websites without their owner's permission, and then copied here, this is done unknowingly. Contact the author and that illustration will be removed or given full acknowledgement.

Acknowledgements

Roger Ilott and Penny Davies not only provided information and an advance copies of *Reverently,* and *Pathways Of A Celtic Land* but spent eight hours without pay or reward to proof-read my mangled manuscript. My grammar checker malfunctioned, but was not obvious. Karen Shearston sent e-mails and information and several members of the Anglican and Uniting churches answered my enquiries. Stuart Heather rushed several of Gary's albums so the biography could be completed.

*

Discography

Albums are in italics, singles in Times New Roman. Those singles which were also released on albums are not included separately. Except for 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' and 'I Get A Kick Out of You.' which are on *Now and Then* copies of Gary Shearston's singles seem untraceable. His albums from 1964 up to 2014 are available from Stuart Heather. Aprenda P.O. Box 182 Campbell ACT 2612. Australia.

Details and information are also available at GaryShearston.com. For details about *Reverently* and *Pathways Of A Celtic Land* contact Restless Music on the web or write to P.O.Box 438 Stanthorpe Queensland 4380 Australia.

The Music

'The Ballad of Thunderbolt'/ The Crayfish Song' 1963 Leeton Label

Folk Songs and Ballads of Australia April 1964
Originally CBS BP233094 (mono) Re-released as GS-464-FSB (2005 – mono) with audio restoration by GaryShearston.com

Songs Of Our Time 1964
Originally CBS BP 233313 (mono) Re-released as GS-764-ST (2005 – mono) with audio restoration by GaryShearston.com

Bolters, Bushrangers and Duffers 1965
Originally CBS BP 233288 (mono) Re-released as GS-1165-BBD (2001 – mono) with audio restoration by GaryShearston.com

The Springtime it Brings on the Shearing 1965
Originally CBS BP 233226 (mono) Re-released as GS-665-CBS (2001) with audio restoration by GaryShearston.com

Gary Shearston Sings His Songs 1966
GS-1966 CBS

Abreaction 1967
Festival FL32,216 (mono) /SFL932,216 (stereo) Re-released as GS-1967-A (2012-original stereo, restored audio) by GaryShearston.com

'I Get A Kick Out of You.' 1974

Dingo 1974
Originally Charisma CAS1091 (UK) / 636958 (Australia) Re-released as GS-1975- D (2001) by GaryShearston.com

"Without A Song.' c1975

The Greatest Stone on Earth – And other Two Bob Wonders 1975
Charisma CAS1106 (UK) / 636968 (Australia) Re-released as GS-1974-D (2001) by GaryShearston.com

'A Whiter Shade of Pale' 1976

'Wild Mountain Thyme' 1978

Aussie Blue 1989
ATM/Larrikin CDLRF 236

Only Love Survives 2001
Rouseabout Records RRR3

Here & There Now & Then -An Anthology of Gary Shearston 2007
Rouseabout Records RRR41

The Best Of All Trades 2009
Rouseabout Records RRR46

Renegade 2011
Rouseabout Records RRR53

The Great Australian Groove 2012
Rouseabout Records RRR57

Reverently 2013
Restess Music RM180

Pathways of A Celtic Land. 2014
Rouseabout Records RM 183

Bibliography

Books:

Baez, Joan. *And A Voice to Sing With: A Memoir.*
London: Century, 1988.

Dylan, Bob. *Chronicles Volume One.*
New York: Simon & Shuster, 2004.

Edwards, Ron. *The Big Book of Australian Folk Song.*
Introduced and Illustrated by the Author.
Adelaide: Rigby, 1976.

Horne, Donald. *Time of Hope: Australia* 1966-72
London: Angus & Robertson, 1980.

Kaplan, Fred. *1959: The Year That Everything Changed.*
Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2009.

Mitchell, Alex. *Come the Revolution: A Memoir.*
Sydney; Newsouth/UNSW Press, 2011.

Meredith, John and Hugh Anderson, *Folk Songs of Australia and the Men and Women who Sang Them.* 1967.
Sydney: Ure Smith, 1973.

Moorhouse, Frank. *Days of Wine and Rage.*
Ringwood: Penguin, 1980.

Roxon, Lillian. *Lillian Roxon's Rock Encyclopaedia* 1969.
New York: The Universal Library/Grosset &Dunlap, 1971.

Strong, Martin C, *The Great Folk Discography: Pioneers and Early Legends.*
Preface by Robin Williamson.
Edinburgh: Polygon, 2010.

Thoms, Albie. *My Generation.*
Sydney: Media, 2012.

e-mails:

Davies, Penny and Roger Ilott. Untitled Corrections. Restless Music e-mail to Garry Hill16th October 2013

Low, Jim. "An Interview with Gary Shearston." S*imply Australia.*2001 .http://www.simplyaustralia.net/interview-garyshearston.html

Shearston, Karen. "Tribute to Gary Shearston." e-mail to Garry Hill. 23/7/2013

Reviews:

Low, Jim. Rev. of *The Best of all Trades.* by Gary Shearston. http://www.simplyaustralia.net/review-jklbesttrades.htmlS*imply Australia.* 2009

Punch, Phil. "Gary Shearston. *The Great Australian Groove."* Nov. 2012 *Trad & Now.* 28th September 2013 http://www.duckscrossing.org/shop/index.php? main_page

Websites:

Anon, "I Get a Kick Out of You." 28th September 2013 *Pop Archives.* This site contains an e-mail from Phil Chapman about his work on the song. http://wwwpoparchives.com.au/1387gary-shearston/i get-a kick-out of -you

Anon, "Gary Shearston Obituary." July 30th 2013 W*orld News Views* 18th September 2013 http://worldnewsviewsww.garyshearston-obituary

Anon, *Gary Shearston* August 24th 2013 http://www.garyshearston.com/

Anon, "Farewell." December 2003 *Bangalow Heartbeat.* 8th September 2013 http://www.heartbeat.net.au/?p=archive&i=article=463

Cashmere, Paul. "Gary Shearston Dies at Age 74." July 4th 2013
Noise 11 15th September 2013.
http://www.noise11.com/news gary-shearston-dies -age-74-20130704

Leigh, Spencer. 'Gary Shearston: Singer who had a hit with Cole Porter's 'Get A Kick out of You.' *The Independent.* Front Page Posted 30th July 2013.

Low, Jim. "Three Early Recordings of Gary Shearston: A Personal Reflection." 2008
Jim Low Singer Songwriter Author 31st August 2013
http://jimlow.net./shearston_recordings.html

Mills, Peter. "Gary Shearston Obituary." July 30th 2013.
The Guardian. 31st August 2103.
http://www.the guardian.com/music/2013/jul/30/garyshearston

Nowara, Zbig. "The Gary Shearston Story.*"* 31st August 2013
The Australian Record Collectors Magazine. Issue 24 pp8-9. 1997.
Rev. November 2000. Updated by Gary.Shearston.com 2011
http://www.garyshearston.com/html/gary_story.html

Turnbull, Malcom J.. "Key Players on the Sydney Coffee Scene" 28/9/ 2013
This is an updated and rearranged 2011 excerpt from Turnbull's earlier work *History of the Australian Folk Revival*. This was originally serialised in *Trad & Now* a magazine. The section used contains an excerpt from a 1992 NLA interview with Gary Shearston.
http://warrenfahey.com/revival_sydney.html

Album Notes:

Baker, John. Gary Shearston. *Songs of Our Time.* CBS. 1965.

Foster, Fred. Paul Clayton. *Paul Clayton Folksinger!* Monument. 2008.

Heatley, Michael. *The Newport Folk Festival 1959.* Notnow Music. 2011.

Ilott, Roger. Gary Shearston. *Reverently...* Restless Music. 2013.

Jorgensen, A.S.. Gary Shearston. *Folk Songs and Ballads of Australia.* CBS. 1964.

Libaek, Sven. Gary Shearston. *Gary Shearston Sings His Songs*. GS-1966-SBS. A 2007 reissue of the original 1966 recording, the original album notes are adapted.

Shearston, Gary. Gary Shearston. *Only Love Survives.* Rouseabout Records. 2001.

----------. *Abreaction.* GS-1967-A. 2005.

----------. Gary Shearston. *Here & There Now & Then.* Rouseabout Records. 2007.

----------. Gary Shearston. *Springtime It Brings On the Shearing.* GS-1966- SBS. 2001.

----------. Gary Shearston. *Bolters, Bushrangers, and Duffers.* GS-1165- BBD. 2001.

----------. Gary Shearston. *Here & There Now & Then.* Rouseabout Records. 2007.

Waters, Edgar. Gary Shearston. *Australian Broadside.* CBS. 1965.

Williams, Stacey. Bob Dylan. *Bob Dylan.* CBS. 1962.

Wikipedia:

Peter Allen, Paul Clayton, Alex Hood, Burl Ives, A.L. Lloyd, Lionel Long, Gary Shearston, Hedy West.

*